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# The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35  
Issue 4 December

Article 14

2008

## Review of *Wives without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*. Anna R. Igra. Reviewed by Laura Curran.

Laura Curran  
*Rutgers University*

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### Recommended Citation

Curran, Laura (2008) "Review of *Wives without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*. Anna R. Igra. Reviewed by Laura Curran.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss4/14>

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deliberation and problem solving.

This book helps to advance knowledge of participation. Explaining patterns of participation by examining the characteristics of the policies in which citizens become involved is extremely unique and insightful; questions concerning who participates remain common in this field. The in-depth nature of the study—especially its theoretical grounding, the provision of methodological rationales, and the successful integration of both quantitative and qualitative data—is an extremely positive quality. Adams' attention to common themes and their exceptions makes the complexity of participation come to life.

Problems also exist. In the final chapter, Adams sets out on the important exercise of assessing the contributions that "citizen lobbyists" make to local democracy. He argues that this mode of participation benefits citizens themselves and does little to advance the broader policy-making process. According to Adams, this approach and the tendency to focus on narrowly defined issues (i.e., those with direct and clear impact) do little to enhance public problem-solving. Two issues surface here. First, there is a tension between this conclusion and the findings related to the value of public meetings. Second, to make such a claim requires documenting the perspectives of policymakers and public administrators, which is not part of the current analysis. The absence of these perspectives leaves the empirical basis for this conclusion unstable and incomplete. Regardless of these concerns, this book does make a considerable contribution to understanding participation and has the potential to enhance efforts to improve participatory policy analysis.

Michael Woodford  
University of Michigan

Anna R. Igra, *Wives without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. \$19.95 papercover.

The marriage promotion, child support, and responsible fatherhood measures contained in mid-1990s welfare reform have been the subject of much scholarly debate. Anna Igra

in her book, *Wives without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935*, tells us that there is a long history behind recent state attempts to promote marriage as an anti-poverty tool. Igra focuses her analysis on the fertile terrain of Progressive Era America. A large body of scholarship addresses Progressive Era intervention into family life and gender arrangements. Much of this work examines the ways in which turn-of-the century maternalist reformers related to women as mothers, and, to a lesser extent, as wives. Igra's history extends this body of literature, revealing how an emerging welfare state approached men as fathers and husbands. In this sense, Igra tells us about the Progressive construction of manhood and the institutionalization of this definition through welfare policy.

Igra's story considers an understudied but influential sector of welfare provision, Jewish charities in New York. While much historical work investigates Protestant and Catholic charities of the period, Igra shows us how Jewish cultural norms and assimilatory desires led to formation of the National Desertion Bureau (NDB), sponsored by the National Conference of Jewish Charities. Relying on an analysis of 300 case files from the NDB, Igra describes how Jewish charity leaders, often of German ancestry, set their sights on ensuring that the vast numbers of immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe would assert a respectable presence in their new homeland. The founders of the NDB believed that the specter of Jewish poverty, and Jewish family breakdown in particular, would fan the flames of anti-Semitism. Desertion constituted the "poor man's divorce" and the NDB was charged with locating and returning errant husbands to their families, thereby avoiding Jewish dependency on welfare. Ironically, Igra argues, in their desire to limit Jewish dependency on the state, Jewish anti-desertion efforts actually increased state intervention into Jewish family life.

Igra's historical analysis takes up the question of the family wage. Desertion policy provided another avenue for Progressive reformers and a nascent welfare state to impose an industrial family wage structure on the poor. Her evidence suggests that immigrant Eastern European Jews arrived on America's shores with an established history of female wage earning within marriage and motherhood, as well as an

alternative ideal of primary female breadwinning among Talmudic scholars. Thus, while Jewish reformers understood male breadwinning as an essential component of assimilation, Jewish immigrants did not embrace this model without ambivalence. Igra's cases demonstrate how both husbands and wives rejected male breadwinning: husbands through their desertion and refusal to pay alimony and child support, and wives through their preference for their own employment or that of their children over involvement with the NDB.

Igra discusses the NDB and desertion policy in relation to other reform initiatives, most significantly the birth of mother's pensions and domestic relations courts. As Igra details, desertion was a central focus in turn-of-the-century debates over mother's pensions. Both advocates and opponents worried that the stipends would encourage desertion and thus deserted women, like never-married mothers, were typically disqualified from assistance. Relatedly, reformers at the NDB participated in the development of legal mechanisms to prosecute abandonment and enforce support, including the development of domestic relations courts that brought together welfare and legal systems. Igra reveals how reformers, through creation of this socio-legal bureaucracy, sought to guard against rising relief rolls and diverted women to the courts. This bureaucratic entanglement ultimately did little to assist deserted women and their children. The NDB was often successful at locating deserting husbands but, as often remains true today, it was very difficult for the courts to enforce support orders.

Igra's convincing analysis, delivered through engaging prose, is a significant contribution to the study of gender and the American welfare state. The work's primary weakness is that Igra fails to consider desertion policy within the larger context of men's relationship with the welfare state, a perspective that could have deepened her argument. Perhaps the main lesson of Igra's work is that over 100 years later, we continue to rely on a historically unsuccessful strategy, now revamped under the guise of welfare reform in a postindustrial economy, to address the issue of family and child poverty.

Laura Curran  
Rutgers University